

Infrastructure work likely part of Charlottetown budget today

Final phase of storm water/ sanitary water system project almost certain to be included

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Expect the City of Charlottetown to announce some important infrastructure work in today's budget.

Coun. Cecil Villard, chair of the city's finance committee, brings down the P. E. I. capital's financial plan for the next year today at noon at city hall.

Almost certain to be in the budget is the final phase of the storm water/ sanitary water combined system. The city could also move forward with an application to begin developing a new water source.

Also, it's a good bet the city makes plans to get started on its next roundabout project in 2014 at what has been called the Vogue Optical intersection in the neighbourhood of Sherwood.

While no one was hinting at what would be in the city's budget, the federal government announced last week a big infusion of money for P. E. I.

National Revenue Minister and Egmont MP Gail Shea said there's \$ 400 million coming for infrastructure projects for the province — that's a guarantee of \$ 25 million a year for 10 years.

On top of that, there's a base fund that's attached to the gas tax as well that amounts to \$ 15 million a year that comes to P. E. I. and that will also be extended for the next decade.

The news got a thumbs- up from Bruce MacDougall, president of the Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities (FPEIM) so it's extremely likely the aforementioned infrastructure projects in Charlottetown get the go- ahead in today's budget.

The city needs about \$ 3 million to finish the storm sewer project that will prevent, once it's done, any further effluent from spilling into the Hillsborough River.

The city would also like to get the new well field project underway soon. The Winter River watershed is the city's sole source of water at the moment and levels have been dropping for years. The capital has come close at times to its drainage limit, based on provincial regulations. Of course, everyone's first thought at budget time is whether there is a tax increase in the general or Water and Sewer Utility areas. Based on last week's news, it's unlikely there will be a tax increase.

Also look for some money to be spent on installing water meters.

There might also be some money in there for 2014 celebrations, marking the 150th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference.

Other than that, there has been precious little speculation in the months leading up to today's budget about any other big- ticket items.

And while there might be talk of balancing the books, keep in mind municipalities are not permitted to run deficits so the books have to be balanced.

Last year, council passed a \$ 43million budget by a 7- 3 margin with Couns. Mitchell Tweel, Danny Redmond and Jason Coady opposing a 42- page document. Concerns were raised that the budgetary process was not inclusive enough and that money should have been budgeted to hire two additional police officers to help with drug enforcement. Tweel was particularly upset with the parks and recreation department having funding reduced for a second straight year. The largest portion of the city's expenditures last year went to policing with just over \$ 8 million budgeted.